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THE LAST COMMAND



SGT.
ASH



CPL.
WORTH

THEY WERE SIX
PARATROOPERS, SIX
TOUGH, RUGGED,
BATTLE-TRAINED
VETERANS, SIX
FIGHTERS. BUT
ONLY ONE OF
THEM WAS A
SOLDIER...



PTE. KEEFER



PTE. SWALES



PTE.
HUMPHRIES



PTE. STACY

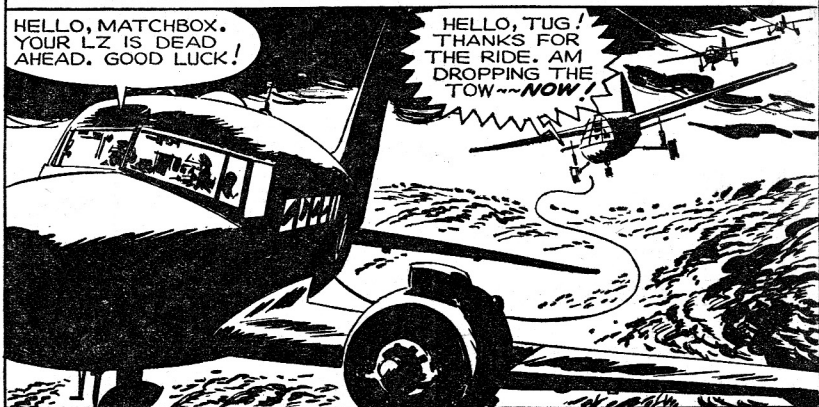


Chapter 1. *Man of Iron*

DECEMBER 1943. TWO HOURS BEFORE A MAJOR BRITISH ATTACK WENT IN, FIVE Horsa GLIDERS SWEEP BEHIND THE GUSTAV LINE IN CENTRAL ITALY.

HELLO, MATCHBOX.
YOUR LZ IS DEAD
AHEAD. GOOD LUCK!

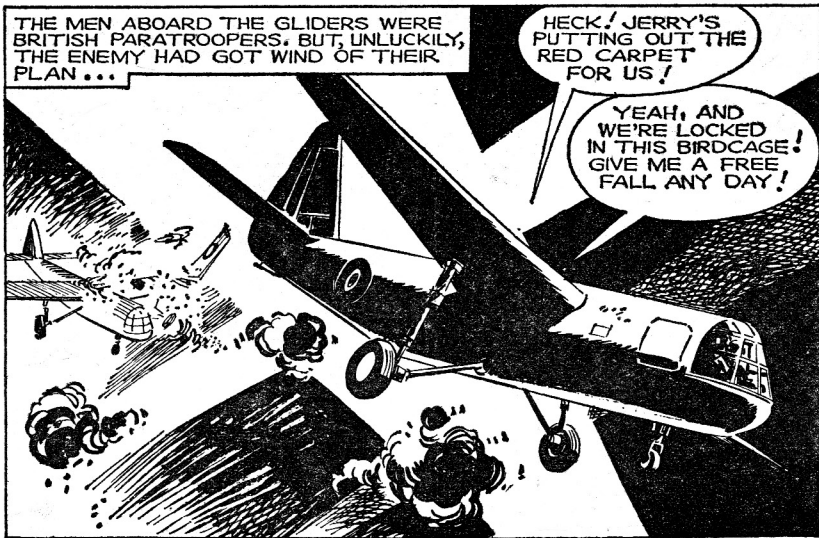
HELLO, TUG!
THANKS FOR
THE RIDE. AM
DROPPING THE
TOW--*NOW!*



THE MEN ABOARD THE GLIDERS WERE BRITISH PARATROOPERS. BUT, UNLUCKILY, THE ENEMY HAD GOT WIND OF THEIR PLAN...

HECK! JERRY'S
PUTTING OUT THE
RED CARPET
FOR US!

YEAH, AND
WE'RE LOCKED
IN THIS BIRDCAGE!
GIVE ME A FREE
FALL ANY DAY!



AS THE HORSA ROCKED IN THE SHELLBURSTS...

LISTEN, SERGEANT ASH. IF I STOP A PACKET, YOU'LL TAKE OVER THE SURVIVORS. DOG COMPANY'S GOT TO BLOW UP THAT JERRY COMMAND POST AT CORTONA BEFORE THE MAIN ATTACK GOES IN.

WE'LL BLOW IT UP, SIR... **ONE WAY OR THE OTHER!**



ALL FIVE GLIDERS WERE RIPPED TO PIECES BY THE FOREWARNED GERMAN GUNS. ONLY TWO OF THEM CRASH-LANDED.

BRACE YOURSELVES, CHAPS!



The Last Command

IN ONE OF THOSE GLIDERS WAS
A SERGEANT CALLED ASH...

SARGE, WE CAN'T LEAVE
THE REST OF THE LADS
IN THERE.

THEY'VE HAD
IT, SWALES...
AND WE'VE
GOT A JOB
TO DO!



HE WAS A SINGLE-MINDED
MAN, SERGEANT ASH...

BUT HECK, SARGE--THE
JERRY H.Q. IS HALF A
MILE AWAY. WE'LL
NEVER MAKE IT...

WE'LL MAKE
IT, CORPORAL--
WE'RE SOLDIERS,
AND WE'VE GOT
OUR ORDERS!



THE STORY OF SERGEANT ASH AND FIVE OF HIS MEN STARTED THAT DAY IN THE ENEMY HELD WOOD AT CORTONA.

HUNT DOWN THE
ENGLANDERS!
SCHNELL!

FOLLOW ME,
MEN!



THE WOODS
BRISTLED WITH
GERMANS...

ENGLANDERS!
HERR OBERST!

THEY'VE
SPOTTED US,
SARGE!

HOLD THEM OFF
WITH A DOZEN MEN,
CORPORAL, KEEFER,
BRING THE
EXPLOSIVES. WE'LL
MAKE FOR THAT
RUIN.



The Last Command

SERGEANT ASH GAVE
CURT ORDERS ...

VORWAERTS!

STAY DOWN
AND HOLD THEM,
BLOKES!

RIGHT~~
NOW WE'LL
HIDE THOSE
BOXES OF
T.N.T.~~AND
HURRY!



EXPLOSIVES, DETONATORS AND WIRE WERE BURIED UNDER A
FLAGSTONE IN THE RUINED CHAPEL.

HECK, WHAT'S
THE SENSE IN
HIDING THIS
STUFF, KEE?

SEARCH ME, SAM. BUT
YOU KNOW ASH. HE WON'T
GIVE THE JERRIES A
TRICK IF HE CAN
HELP IT!

AAAGH!



THE GERMANS SOON OVERRAN THE LITTLE GROUP OF PARATROOPERS.

SURRENDER, ENGLANDERS!

OKAY, MEN, YOU'VE DONE YOUR DUTY AS SOLDIERS. DROP YOUR WEAPONS NOW!



A GUN IN HIS BACK, ASH LOOKED GRIMLY AT THE RUIN ...

WELL...DOG COMPANY NEVER REACHED ITS OBJECTIVE, BUT THE GAME'S NOT PLAYED OUT YET. IF WE EVER GET BACK HERE THAT'S ONE ACE WE'VE GOT UP OUR SLEEVES.

MOVE!



THE PRISONERS, FIFTY OF THEM ALTOGETHER, WERE MARCHED DEEP INTO THE WOOD.

SO THIS IS THE JERRY H.Q. WE WERE SUPPOSED TO CLOBBER.

YEAH, NO WONDER THE BOMBER BOYS COULDN'T SPOT IT FROM THE AIR.

MOVE! SILENCE, PIGS!



The Last Command

NEXT DAY, THE PRISONERS WERE HERDED INTO A P.O.W. CAGE AT AVEZZANO.

HERE, YOU SPEAK GERMAN, STACY. WHAT ARE THOSE SQUAREHEADS SAYING?



PRIVATE STACY TRANSLATED.

THE FAT ONE SAID THAT THE BRITISH ATTACK WAS A FAILURE, SERGEANT. HE MEANS THE BIG PUSH ON THE GUSTAV LINE, I THINK, NOT OUR SIDESHOW.

YEAH, THE BIG PUSH WE WERE SUPPOSED TO HELP BY WIPING OUT THAT JERRY COMMAND POST. WELL, MAYBE WE'LL GET A SECOND BITE AT THE CHERRY.



TWO WEEKS LATER, THE SURVIVORS OF DOG COMPANY WERE MARCHED TO THE RAILROAD.

MOVE, YOU SWINE! THE TRAIN IS WAITING!

A TRAIN, EH? THEY'RE SENDING US NORTH TO GERMANY, THEN. IT'S NOW OR MAYBE NEVER...





The Last Command

SERGEANT ASH TOOK THE CHANCE...

BASH
THROUGH-
THEM, MEN!MY OATH~~
THE SARGE
IS CRAZY!NO, MATE,
HE'S JUST
GOT A ONE-
TRACK
MIND.

BUT THE ODDS WERE AGAINST HIM.

OKAY, MEN~~
WE'LL MAKE
FOR THAT
RUINED CHAPEL
IN THE WOOD~~
UUH!SO! THIS IS AS
FAR AS YOU GO,
ENGLANDER
SCHWEIN!

GRIMLY, SERGEANT ASH GAVE IN...

IN GERMANY, MY
FRIENDS, WHERE YOU
ARE GOING, THERE
WILL BE NO SUCH
ESCAPADES.FAIR ENOUGH,
SQUAREHEAD~~
BUT WE'RE NOT
IN GERMANY
YET...

THE PUNISHMENT WAS TO BE SEVERE.

THESE THIRTY MEN, HERR KAPITAN, WILL BE CHAINED BY THE LEG AND ARM DURING THE JOURNEY NORTH! THEY ARE DISOBEDIENT SWINE!



THE MEN WHO HAD TRIED TO ESCAPE WERE CHAINED IN THEIR TRUCK.

THE HERR MAJOR IS A HARD MAN, ENGLANDER. I GIVE YOU SOME PLAY WITH YOUR LEGS AND HANDS, SO ~ BUT YOU SHOULD OBEY ORDERS.

THANKS, JERRY. I'LL OBEY ORDERS, ALL RIGHT ~ THE ONES I GOT FROM MY COMPANY COMMANDER!



The Last Command

SERGEANT ASH WAS A PATIENT MAN. HE COULD WAIT FOR THE NEXT OPPORTUNITY TO ESCAPE.



HE WAS ALSO A STUBBORN MAN...



ASH WASTED NO TIME.



GALVANISED BY HOPE, THE MANACLED MEN CALLED TO ASH.

HERE, SARGE,
GET ME OUT OF
THESE CHAINS.

HURRY, SARGE, FOR
PETE'S SAKE ~~~
THERE'S A LOT OF
US !

ME, SARGE...
ME FIRST !



BUT ASH HAD HIS OWN PLANS.

QUIET, ALL OF YOU ! LET'S
GET ONE THING STRAIGHT.
THE MEN WHO COME WITH
ME AREN'T HEADING FOR
EASY STREET. WE'RE
STILL SOLDIERS. WE'VE
STILL GOT A JOB OF
WORK TO DO...



The Last Command

AND AS THE TRAIN SLOWED, HE PREPARED TO CARRY THEM OUT...



ASH HAD FREED SIX MEN BY THE TIME CORPORAL WORTH GAVE THE WARNING.

SARGE, JERRIES COMING. THEY'RE TWO TRUCKS AWAY YET.



THE PRISONERS' TRAIN HAD STOPPED. A GERMAN AMMUNITION TRAIN, HEADING SOUTH, WAS APPROACHING.

YOU'VE GOT TIME TO UNLOCK ONE MORE, SARGE.

HERE, WHAT ABOUT TAKING AN INTERPRETER WITH US, SARGE -- STACY SPEAKS GERMAN.

GOOD IDEA, KEEFER.



PRIVATE STACY WAS THE SEVENTH AND LAST MAN TO BE FREED BY SERGEANT ASH.

HERE, SARGE, YOU'RE NOT LETTING THAT LITTLE TWERP GO FREE AND LEAVING THE REST OF US TO ROT HERE, ARE YOU?

THERE'S ONLY TIME TO RELEASE A FEW OF YOU, FOWLER. STACY MAY BE A DUFF SOLDIER, BUT HE SPEAKS GERMAN. HE'LL BE USEFUL TO ME...



ASH'S VOICE WAS AS HARD AS HIS GRANITE FACE...

SO IT'S ONLY THE ONES WHO'LL BE USEFUL TO YOU WHO GET THEIR FREEDOM, ASH?



THEIR FREEDOM TO FIGHT, YES! I'VE CHOSEN THE TOUGHEST SOLDIERS BECAUSE I'VE GOT A TOUGH JOB FOR THEM. AS FAR AS I'M CONCERNED, THE REST OF YOU ARE STALAG MATERIAL.

The Last Command

THE EIGHT MEN DROPPED ON TO THE TRACK. ASH GAVE HARSH ORDERS AS THE GERMANS WHEELED.

ACHTUNG!
THE PRISONERS
ARE ESCAPING!

THEY'VE
SEEN US,
SARGE!

ACROSS THE TRACK
MEN. WILLIAMS AND
DEAKIN, KEEP
RUNNING ~~~ I WANT
THOSE JERRIES TO
FOLLOW YOU DOWN
THE EMBANKMENT.



THE GERMANS SPOTTED THE PRISONERS ON THE EMBANKMENT BEYOND THE PASSING TRAIN.

THERE
ARE THE
ENGLANDERS!

CURSE THIS TRAIN!
FOLLOW THE SWINE
WHEN IT HAS
PASSED!



WHEN THE SECOND TRAIN HAD PASSED, THE GERMANS GAVE CHASE.



IT WAS FIVE MINUTES BEFORE THE GERMANS, REALISED THAT THEY HAD BEEN FOOLED.



SERGEANT ASH AND HIS FIVE MEN HAD SWUNG ON TO THE ROOF OF THE PASSING TRAIN. THEY WERE FREE, AND HEADING SOUTH.

WE MADE IT, BLOKES! BY HECK, WE MADE IT!

SHUT UP, KEEPER. KEEP DOWN, MEN. WE'LL CRAWL FORWARD TO THAT OPEN TRUCK AHEAD.



THE MEN WERE JUBILANT. BUT ASH FACED THEM GRIMLY...

COR, I CAN'T BELIEVE IT! WE'RE FREE! I COULD KISS YOU, SARGE!

HERE, WHEN DO WE GET OFF THIS TRAIN AND HEAD NORTH TOWARDS SWITZERLAND, SARGE?

WE DON'T, CORPORAL!



AS KEEFER HAD SAID, SERGEANT ASH WAS A MAN WITH A ONE-TRACK MIND ...

BUT SWITZERLAND'S NEUTRAL, AND WE'RE ONLY NINETY MILES FROM THE BORDER. ONCE WE'RE OVER, WE'LL BE SAFE ...

WE DIDN'T ESCAPE TO BE SAFE, CORPORAL. WE ESCAPED TO FIGHT!



... AND THAT TRACK LED INEXORABLY SOUTH, TO THE BATTLEFRONT FOUR HUNDRED MILES AWAY.

WE'RE GOING BACK, MEN! FOUR HUNDRED MILES BACK, TO THE BATTLEFRONT! WE'RE GOING TO CARRY OUT ORDERS! WE'RE GOING TO DO OUR DUTY AS SOLDIERS BY BLOWING UP THAT JERRY H.Q. IN THE WOOD AT CORTONA!

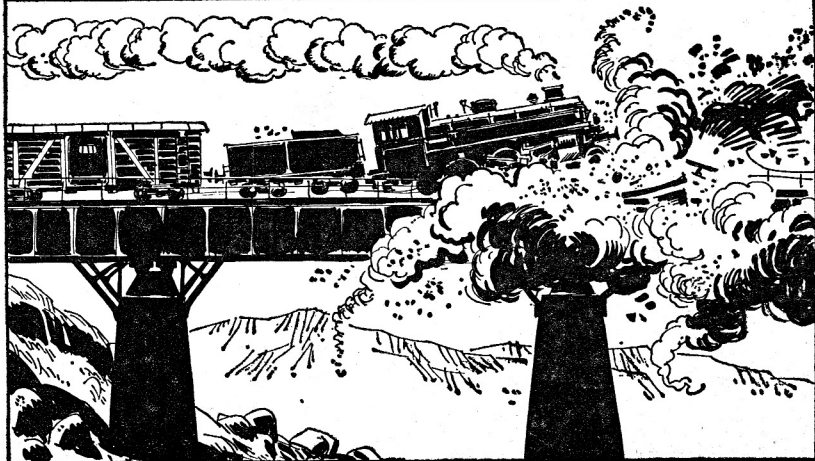


Chapter 2. *The Black Marketeer*

BUT THE JOURNEY SOUTH WAS NOT GOING TO BE SO SIMPLE. THERE WAS A SMALL PACKAGE STRAPPED TO THE RAILS OF THE VIADUCT ...



THE PACKAGE WAS DYNAMITE. IT EXPLODED WITH A SHATTERING ROAR AS THE ENGINE TRIPPED THE DETONATOR.



THE SIX PARATROOPERS WERE FLUNG ABOUT THE SHAKING TRUCK LIKE PUPPETS.

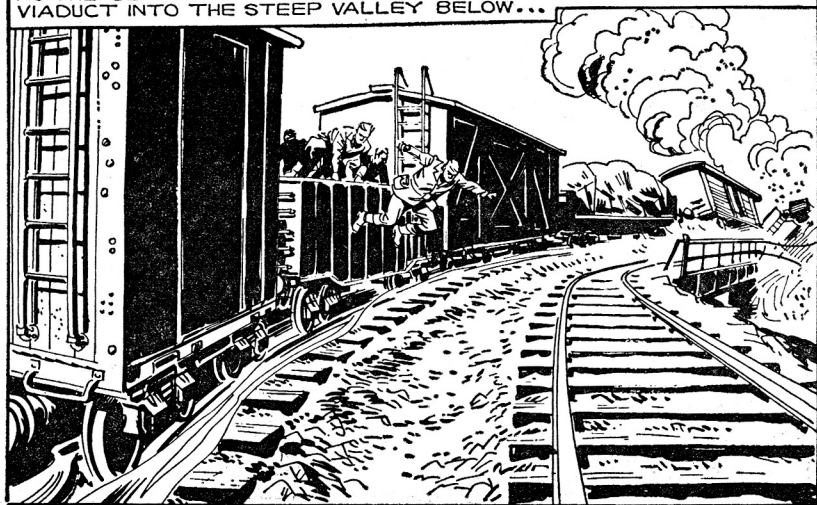
UUUGH!

MY OATH!

JUMP FOR IT, MEN!



AS THE GERMAN AMMUNITION TRAIN PLUNGED OFF THE WRECKED VIADUCT INTO THE STEEP VALLEY BELOW...



The Last Command

SERGEANT ASH AND HIS FIVE MEN JUMPED TO SAFETY JUST IN TIME...

ALL OKAY, MEN?

YEAH, SARGE. HUMP TOOK A KNOCK, BUT I'VE GOT HIM.

LUMME! WHAT HIT US?



THEY WATCHED THE DOOMED TRAIN WITH GRIM EYES.

WELL, THERE GOES OUR TRANSPORT!

COME ON, MEN. WE'D BETTER MAKE TRACKS. IF THAT TRAIN WAS SABOTAGED, JERRY'S GOING TO TURN THIS VALLEY UPSIDE DOWN.



BUT THEY WERE NOT ALONE ON THE WOODED SLOPES OF THE VALLEY.



WATCH IT!

HECK! BULLETS! YOU SHOULDN'T HAVE SAID THAT ABOUT JERRY, SARGE.

BUT THE MEN WITH GUNS
WORE NO UNIFORMS ...

AVANT! !
SURROUND
THEM!

HERE, SARGE ~~~
THEY'RE NOT
JERRIES! **THEY'RE
EYTIES ~~~
PARTISANS!**



THE GUNS WERE LOWERED. PARTISANS
AND PARATROOPERS GRINNED AT
EACH OTHER IN DELIGHT.

THAT'S RIGHT,
FRIEND. WE'RE
BRITISH~INGLESE~
ESCAPED
PRISONERS!

IT IS GOOD. WE
ITALIANS ALSO HIT
THE DIRTY GERMANS,
YOU SEE. COME, WE
SHOW YOU...



THE ITALIAN LED ASH AND HIS MEN TO THE WRECKED TRAIN IN THE VALLEY.

SO IT WAS YOU PARTISANS WHO WRECKED THE TRAIN, EH, FRIEND?

SI, INGLESE. A DETONATOR WIRED TO THE VIADUCT ~~ MUCH DAMAGE, MANY DEAD GERMANS. MUCH PROFIT, TOO!



THE PARTISANS WORKED BUSILY, AND IT WAS NOT WAR MATERIAL THEY SALVAGED FROM THE WRECKED TRAIN.

PRESTO... PRESTO!

THEY'RE HITTING JERRY ALL RIGHT. BUT THEY'RE OUT TO LINE THEIR OWN POCKETS, TOO, BY THE LOOK OF IT!



THERE WERE ONLY A HANDFUL OF GERMAN SURVIVORS, BUT PRIVATE HUMPHRIES FOUND THEM.

RENNEN~~ RUN FOR IT! SCHNELL!

NO, YOU DON'T, YOU ROTTEN DEVILS! PUT US IN CHAINS! WOULD YOU?



HUMPHRIES WAS SMOULDERING WITH RAGE. HE IGNORED SERGEANT ASH'S SHOUT...

I'LL GET MY OWN BACK ON YOU, YOU SWINE!

COME BACK, HUMPHRIES! THAT'S AN ORDER!

ACH--SO!



THE GRENADE BURST AT HUMPHRIES' FEET. IT KILLED HIM INSTANTLY.

AAAAH!



THEY BURIED HUMPHRIES IN THE VALLEY. SERGEANT ASH SPOKE HIS GRIM EPITAPH...

ALL HE WANTED WAS REVENGE. HE WAS BRAVE ENOUGH, AND TOUGH ENOUGH... BUT HE WAS NO SOLDIER!

COME, INGLESE!



THE PARTISANS, HEAVILY-LOADED, LED THE PARATROOPERS TO CARS HIDDEN IN THE TREES.

YOU COME WITH US, INGLESE. WE RETURN TO MILANO NOW. LUIGI, OUR PADRONE, HE WILL LOOK AFTER YOU.

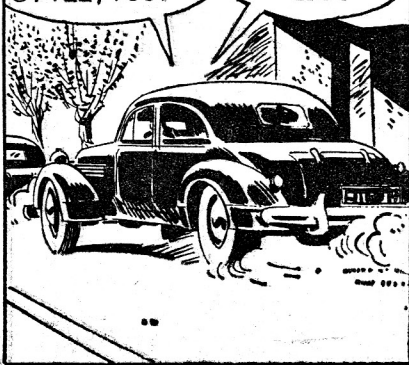
SO LONG AS HE'LL HELP US ON OUR WAY SOUTH, FRIEND, TO THE BATTLEFRONT. THAT'S ALL WE WANT!



THEY WERE BRAND NEW CARS, LUXURIOUSLY EQUIPPED AND BOLDLY DRIVEN.

SAY WHAT YOU LIKE, SARGE, THESE EYTIES ARE SMOOTH OPERATORS. THEY DO THINGS IN STYLE, TOO.

YOU KEEP YOUR HEAD DOWN, KEEFER, AND YOUR MIND ON YOUR OWN JOB.



ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF MILAN, THE CARS TURNED INTO THE DRIVE OF A SECLUDED MANSION...

BUONO!
LET US HOPE
THE PICKINGS
WERE GOOD!

SHEPPI
RETURNS,
PADRONE.



THE FAT ITALIAN, LUIGI, WAS THE BOSS OF THE PARTISAN GROUP.

SI, WE WILL HELP YOU TO REACH
THE SOUTH, INGLESE, IF YOU
WOULD RATHER DO THAT THAN
STAY HERE AND WORK WITH US.
BUT FIRST WE MUST DISGUISE
YOU. I HAVE GERMAN
ARMY UNIFORMS...

NIX TO THAT,
MISTER. WE'RE
NOT SABOTEURS,
WE'RE SOLDIERS.
CIVVIES WILL
SUIT US. BUT
MAKE IT FAST.



The Last Command



THE PARTISANS' TARGET WAS A PALATIAL BUILDING ON LAKE GARDA SIXTY MILES FROM MILAN...



THE LOLLING GERMANS, HIGH-RANKING OFFICERS, STUMBLED TO THEIR FEET AS THE PARTISANS ATTACKED.



PRIVATE KEEFER TOOK TO THE WORK AS THOUGH TO THE MANNER BORN. IT WAS LIGHT WORK, AT THAT...

OUT OF MY WAY, FATSO!

BENE! YOU HAVE THE RIGHT IDEA, INGLESSE. THERE IS NO NEED TO CUT THE PROFIT BY USING BULLETS.

THERE WAS A CAMERA ON THE TABLE, A WRISTWATCH. KEEFER GRABBED THEM.

PROFIT--YEAH-- THAT'S THE BEST REASON I KNOW FOR FIGHTING A WAR!

DO WE JOIN IN, SARGE?

NO, CORPORAL, WE STAY OUT!

SERGEANT ASH WATCHED THE PARTISAN RAID WITH DISGUST.

THIS ISN'T A MILITARY ATTACK--IT'S A SMASH-AND-GRAB RAID! WE'RE SOLDIERS, NOT BURGLARS!

HERE, SARGE, THERE'S ONE THING WE MIGHT GRAB, AT LEAST, IF YOU WANT TO MAKE TRACKS, THAT IS...

SWALES WAS POINTING AT A POWERFUL CAR IN THE DRIVEWAY...



ASH AND HIS MEN PILED ABOARD THE CAR. BUT PRIVATE KEEFER MADE NO MOVE TO JOIN THEM...



The Last Command

ASH DID NOT ARGUE. HE TURNED HIS BACK ON KEEFER AND CLIMBED INTO THE CAR...



FOUR MEN HAD BEEN LEFT BEHIND ALREADY, TWO CAPTURED, ONE DEAD, AND ONE ON EASY STREET.

THAT'S ANOTHER ONE I MISJUDGED~~ FRIEND KEEFER. HE'S AS TOUGH AS THEY COME~~ BUT HE'S A SCAVENGER, NOT A SOLDIER. WELL, THERE'S FOUR OF US LEFT, ANYWAY~~ FOUR SOLDIERS.

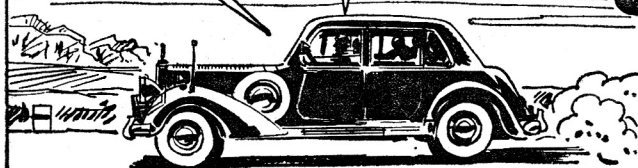


Chapter 3. *The Man at the Plough*

THEY DROVE SOUTH ACROSS THE LOMBARDY PLAIN, BY-PASSING BOLOGNA.

WELL, THAT'S A HUNDRED MILES BEHIND US.

BUT THREE HUNDRED TO GO, SARGE ~ AND EVERY ONE OF THEM CRAWLING WITH JERRIES.



NORTH OF FLORENCE, THEY CAME SUDDENLY, TOO LATE TO TURN BACK, ON A GERMAN ROAD BLOCK.

HALTEN!
HALTEN!

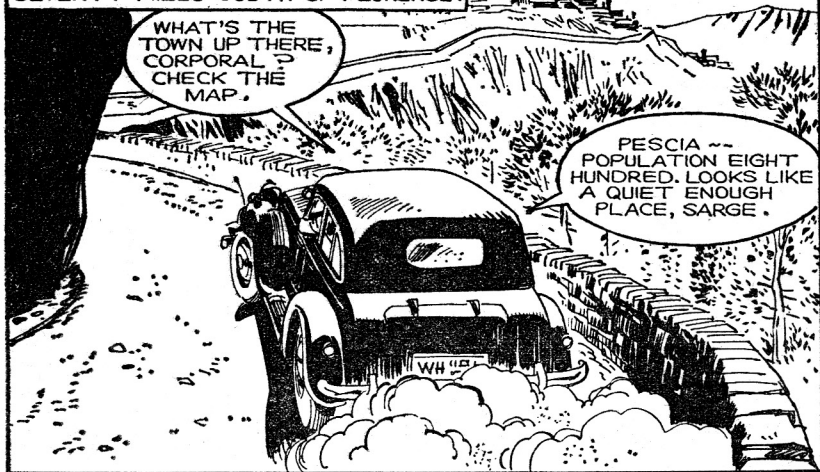
SMASH
STRAIGHT
THROUGH,
CORPORAL!



THEY ESCAPED, BUT THEY NEEDED A WEEK IN HIDING TO REPAIR THE CAR.



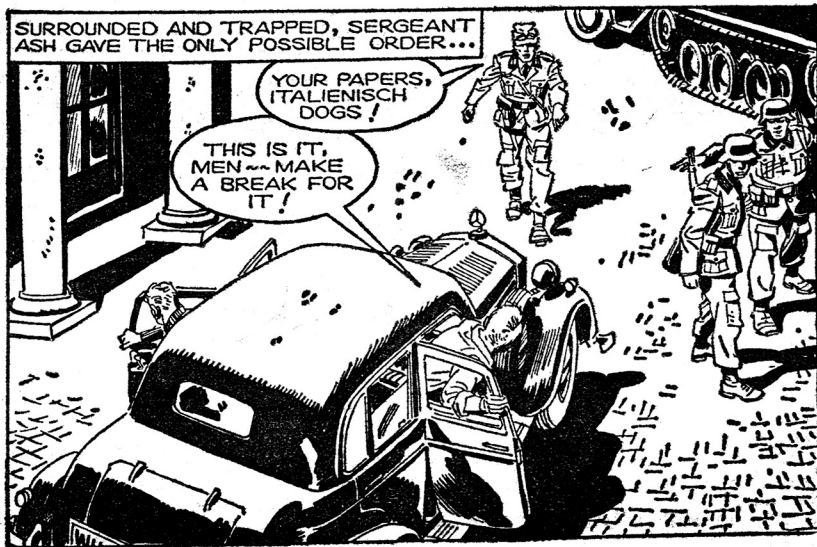
IT WAS LATE FEBRUARY WHEN THEY REACHED THE TOWN IN TUSCANY, SEVENTY MILES SOUTH OF FLORENCE.



BUT A GERMAN ARMoured COLUMN FILLED THE LITTLE SQUARE OF THE TOWN...



SURROUNDED AND TRAPPED, SERGEANT ASH GAVE THE ONLY POSSIBLE ORDER...



BULLETS RAKED AFTER THE RUNNING PARATROOPERS. TWO OF THEM HIT ASH.

FEUER! SHOOT THE DOGS DOWN!

SARGE... WE'VE HAD IT!

NO~~AAH~~ GET ME ROUND THAT CORNER, CORP...

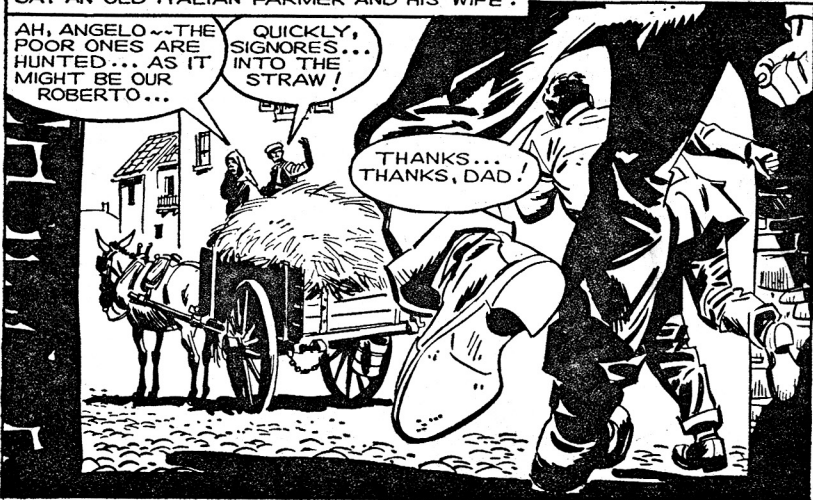


THERE WAS A HAY CART PARKED AROUND THE CORNER. ON THE BOX SAT AN OLD ITALIAN FARMER AND HIS WIFE.

AH, ANGELO~~THE POOR ONES ARE HUNTED... AS IT MIGHT BE OUR ROBERTO...

QUICKLY, SIGNORES... INTO THE STRAW!

THANKS... THANKS, DAD!



WHEN THE GERMANS POUNDED INTO THE NARROW STREET, THE FUGITIVES HAD VANISHED.



SEARCH THE HOUSES, MEN. THESE DOGS MUST BE FOUND!

GET OUT OF THE WAY, OLD FOOL... YOU AND YOUR STINKING CART!

BURIED IN THE HAY, INCHES FROM DISCOVERY AND DEATH, PRIVATE SWALES WAS SMILING.

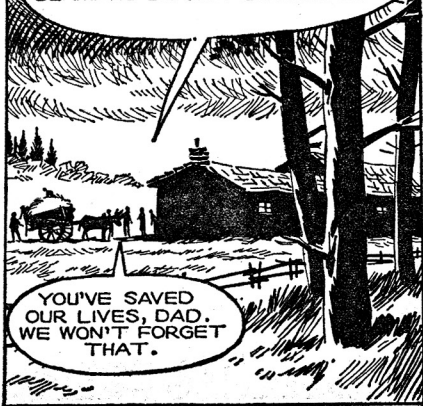
STOP RUSTLING THAT HAY, SAM. JERRY MAY HAVE FOLLOWED US OUT OF THE TOWN.

SORRY, CORP. BUT HECK, IT SMELLS GOOD, THE HAY. I USED TO WORK ON A FARM, YOU KNOW...



THE HAY CART TURNED INTO A DECREPIT FARMYARD FIVE MILES FROM THE TOWN.

YOU WILL BE SAFE HERE, INGLES. IT IS A POOR FARM AND THE GERMANS DO NOT BOTHER US.



YOU'VE SAVED OUR LIVES, DAD. WE WON'T FORGET THAT.

The Last Command

A FRIENDLY COUNTRY DOCTOR TREATED THE WOUNDED SERGEANT ASH IN THE FARMHOUSE THAT NIGHT.



IN THE KITCHEN OF THE FARMHOUSE, SAM SWALES TALKED TO THE OLD COUPLE AND THEIR DAUGHTER.





The Last Command

BUT TO THE GERMANS THIS WAS JUST ANOTHER SON OF THE SOIL, JUST ANOTHER BIG MAN OF NO PARTICULAR NATIONALITY LEANING ON A PLOUGH.

ACH, COME, HEINRICH, YOU WILL GET NOTHING OUT OF HIM.

JA, THEY ARE ALL ALIKE, THESE PEASANTS—DUMB ANIMALS...

IN TWO MORE WEEKS, SERGEANT ASH WAS ON HIS FEET AGAIN.

ONE MORE WEEK, AND YOU WILL BE FIT TO GO, INGLESSE. THERE IS AN OLD FARM TRUCK I COULD GET FOR YOU, IF YOU ARE STILL DETERMINED TO TRAVEL SOUTH.

THANKS, DOC. WE'RE STILL DETERMINED—AREN'T WE, MEN?



THE MORNING THE TRUCK CAME, SAM SWALES WAS WORKING ON THE LAND AS USUAL...

ALL SET,
ASH...

RIGHT. WHERE'S
SAM? **HEY, COME
ON, SAM, WE'RE
LEAVING!**

BUT THE LAND SMILES UNDER
HIS HAND, ANGELO... AND OUR
SOPHIA, HE HAS MADE HER
SMILE, TOO. IT WILL BE LIKE
LOSING ANOTHER SON...



AND SAM SWALES
WOULD NEVER
LEAVE THE LAND
AGAIN...

I'M SORRY, SARGE~~
BUT I'D BE NO GOOD
TO YOU IN A FIGHT. MY
HEART WOULDN'T BE IN IT.
**IT'S HERE NOW, IN THE
LAND. I'M NOT COMING
WITH YOU...**



The Last Command

THEY LEFT ANOTHER MAN BEHIND AT THE FARM IN TUSCANY, THE MAN AT THE PLOUGH.

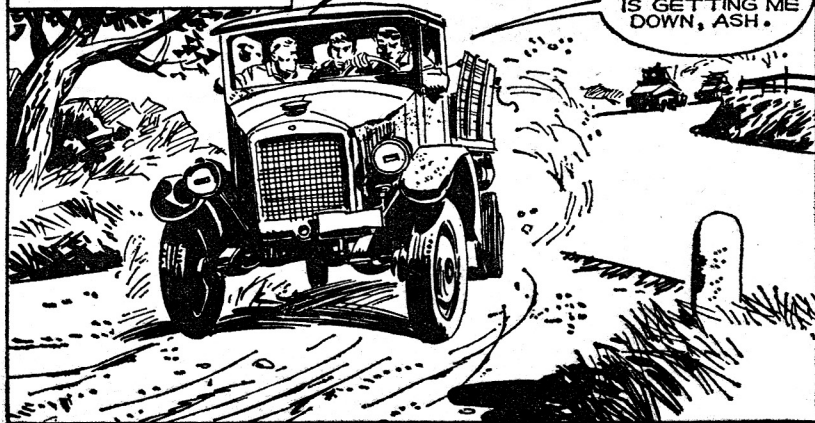
LET'S GET MOVING THEN, CORPORAL. THAT'S ANOTHER TOUGH MAN WHO'S NO SOLDIER...



BY THE END OF APRIL, THE TRUCK HAD REACHED THE BATTLE AREA. ENEMY TRAFFIC WAS THICKENING ON THE ROAD.

GET ON TO THE SIDE ROAD, CORP. THERE'S ANOTHER JERRY CONVOY OVERTAKING US.

HECK, THIS DODGING ABOUT IS GETTING ME DOWN, ASH.



Chapter 4. The Soldier

CORPORAL WORTH WAS GETTING EDGY WITH FATIGUE AND STRAIN.



PRIVATE STACY FELT THE LASH OF THE CORPORAL'S TONGUE.



The Last Command

ASH TRIED TO STEADY THE CORPORAL DURING THE LAST DAYS OF THE LONG JOURNEY SOUTH.

ORDERS! BUT SOMETIMES A BLOKE GETS COCKEYED ORDERS. ORDERS TO SHOVE HIS HEAD IN A NOOSE--TO COMMIT SUICIDE LIKE WE'RE DOING...

DON'T LOSE YOUR NERVE, CORP. WE'LL MAKE IT TO CORTONA. WE'LL FINISH THAT JOB DOG COMPANY STARTED.

THE SPRING BATTLE FOR THE GERMAN GUSTAV LINE WAS IMMINENT...

ACH, DO NOT FUSS, HELMUT. IT IS ONLY AN ITALIAN FARM TRUCK. YOU SEE SABOTEURS EVERYWHERE.

DO NOT FUSS, HE SAYS--WITH THE ENGLANDERS READY TO ATTACK OUR LINE IN FORCE ANY DAY NOW.

AND THE THREE SURVIVING PARATROOPERS WERE NEARING THE END OF THEIR PERILOUS JOURNEY...

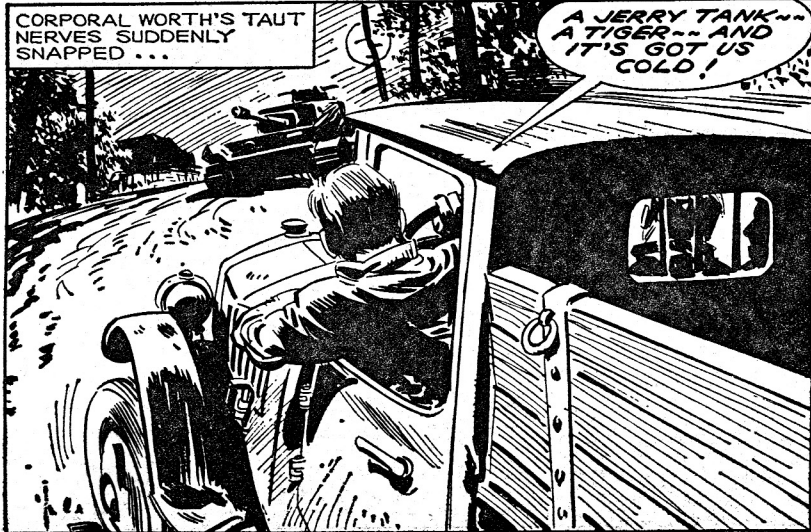
SO IT LOOKS AS THOUGH WE'RE GOING TO BE JUST IN TIME. WE CAN BLOW UP THAT GERMAN COMMAND POST WHEN THE MAIN ATTACK GOES IN, AS ORIGINALLY PLANNED.

YEAH, IF WE EVER GET THESE LAST TWENTY MILES TO CORTONA.



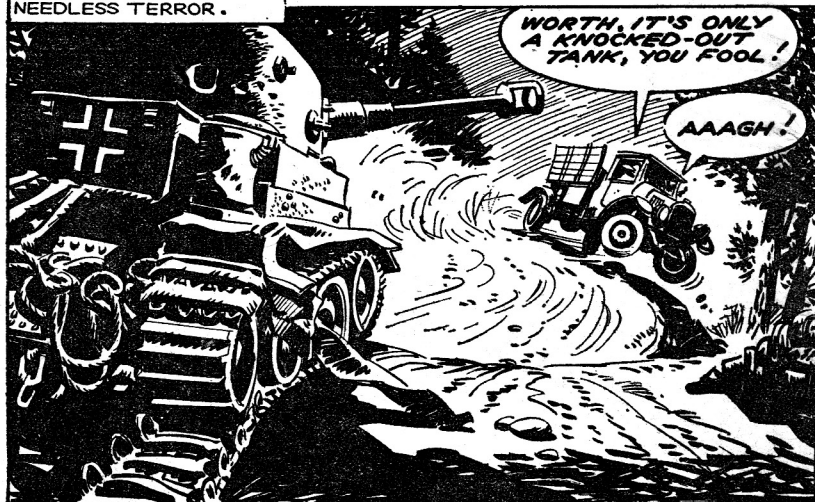
CORPORAL WORTH'S TAUT NERVES SUDDENLY SNAPPED...

A JERRY TANK-- A TIGER-- AND IT'S GOT US COLD!



The Last Command

CORPORAL WORTH WRENCHED THE TRUCK OFF THE ROAD IN HIS NEEDLESS TERROR.



THE TRUCK SMASHED WITH PULVERISING FORCE INTO THE DITCH. ONLY ASH AND PRIVATE STACY CRAWLED OUT OF THE WRECK OF IT...

STACY-- YOU'RE--
YOU'RE 'OKAY ?





The Last Command

PRIVATE STACY DRAGGED BACK THE FLAGSTONE. ASH BREATHED A SIGH OF RELIEF.

NO, IT'S STILL HERE. BY HECK, WE'LL CARRY OUT ORDERS AND BLOW UP THAT JERRY COMMAND POST AFTER ALL.

YES, SERGEANT.

ASH STEPPED DOWN INTO THE CAVITY -- AND LET OUT A STRANGLED CRY AS THE EARTH GAVE WAY UNDER HIM ...

I'LL JUST GET THE PACKAGE UP...HEY! WHAT THE...?

THE LIGHT OF THE MATCH FLARED ALONG NARROW BRICK WALLS, RUNNING WITH DAMP.

SERGEANT--
ARE YOU ALL
RIGHT ?

YEAH--MY OATH,
YEAH! THERE'S
A TUNNEL DOWN
HERE--AND IT LOOKS
AS IF IT HEADS
STRAIGHT TOWARDS
THAT JERRY
COMMAND POST!

PRIVATE STACY WAITED OBEDIENTLY.

OKAY, STACY~~I'M GOING ALONG THE TUNNEL WITH THE T.N.T. AND WIRES. WITH ANY LUCK, IT'LL TAKE ME RIGHT UNDER THAT JERRY COMMAND POST. YOU JUST SIT TIGHT HERE AND DO NOTHING. GOT THAT?

YES, SERGEANT.



ASH THOUGHT ABOUT STACY, CONTEMPTUOUSLY, AS HE CRAWLED ALONG THE TUNNEL.

IF ONLY ONE OF THE OTHERS, THE TOUGH ONES, HAD TURNED OUT TO BE A SOLDIER~~KEEFER, OR SWALES, OR WORTH. THAT STACY IS A WET DUCK. HECK, I'LL JUST HAVE TO DO THE JOB ON MY OWN...



The Last Command

THE TUNNEL RAN UNDERGROUND FOR HALF A MILE. AT LAST IT CURVED UPWARDS TO THE SURFACE ...

UUH...EASY... UUH...
MY OATH, I WAS RIGHT!
IT'S BROUGHT ME OUT
SMACK IN THE MIDDLE
OF THE JERRY H.Q.



SERGEANT ASH CRAWLED OUT INTO THE HEART OF THE ENEMY COMMAND POST.

MEIN EIGEN
LILI MARLENE...
MEIN EIGEN LILI
MARLENE...

NOW TO
WIRE UP THIS
BLOCKHOUSE...
HECK, THIS IS THE
FIRST TIME
I EVER HEARD
JERRIES SINGING.



THE GERMAN HEADQUARTERS WAS QUIET THAT NIGHT. THE QUIETNESS HIT ASH HARDER THAN DANGER WOULD HAVE DONE.

IT IS SO PEACEFUL TONIGHT, KARL. I WISH IT WERE ALWAYS SO...

JUST A COUPLE OF MEN HAVING A QUIET CHAT. I'VE ONLY SEEN JERRIES WITH GUNS IN THEIR HANDS BEFORE...



ASH'S EXPERIENCE OF GERMANS HAD BEEN ALL VIOLENCE BEFORE. NOW IT WAS VERY DIFFERENT...

MY TRICK, I THINK...

NEVER MIND, KAMERAD. HEINRICH WILL BE UNLUCKY TOMORROW NIGHT.

PLAYING CARDS -- SINGING -- HECK, THEY'RE JUST ORDINARY HUMAN BEINGS, AFTER ALL...



The Last Command

ASH'S HANDS WERE SHAKING WHEN HE LOWERED HIMSELF INTO THE TUNNEL THIRTY MINUTES LATER.

WELL, THAT'S THE T.N.T. TAMPED AND WIRED. ENOUGH TO BLOW EVERY JERRY IN THIS COMMAND POST SKY-HIGH WHEN I PRESS THE PLUNGER. BUT, HECK, I MUSN'T THINK OF THAT...



STUMBLING BACK ALONG THE TUNNEL, A SICK DISGUST SEIZED ASH...

DON'T THINK OF IT! YEAH, IT'S EASY TO SAY THAT--BUT WHEN YOU SEE THOSE JERRIES SINGING, PLAYING CARDS, IT MAKES YOU THINK. IT MAKES YOU WONDER WHAT YOU'RE DOING, KILLING THEM...



HE WAS STILL MUTTERING FEVERISHLY TO HIMSELF WHEN HE REACHED THE RUINED CHAPEL AGAIN.

KILLING THEM? IT'S MURDER, MORE LIKE! IF ONLY THEY WERE TRYING TO KILL ME, FIGHTING LIKE SOLDIERS, IT'D BE EASY TO PRESS. THE PLUNGER THEN...

SERGEANT-- ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?



GUNS SHUDDERED TO THE SOUTH AT THAT MOMENT. THE SKY GLARED.

YEAH--I'M ALL RIGHT, STACY. AND LISTEN--THAT'S OUR GUNS OPENING UP ON THE FRONT LINE THE MAIN ATTACK MUST BE GOING IN. **NOW I'VE GOT TO PRESS THAT PLUNGER!**

YES, SERGEANT, OF COURSE!



The Last Command

THE DETONATOR BOX WAS READY. ASH REACHED FOR IT WITH SHAKING HANDS.

I CAME FOUR HUNDRED MILES BACK TO CARRY OUT ORDERS. I'M A SOLDIER. IT'S MY DUTY TO WIPE OUT THAT JERRY COMMAND POST.

WHO ARE YOU TRYING TO PERSUADE, SERGEANT?

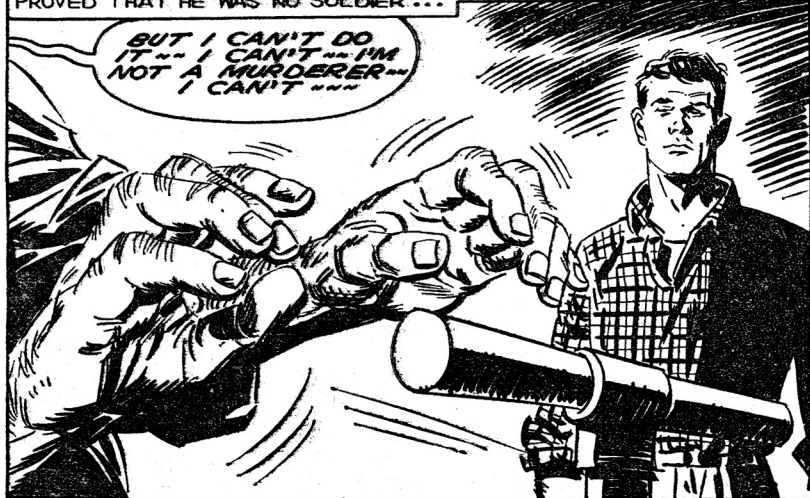


THE GRANITE FACE OF SERGEANT ASH WAS CRACKING NOW, CRUMBLING...

I'VE GOT TO BLOW IT UP! I'VE GOT TO WIPE OUT THE LOT OF THEM -- THAT'S MY DUTY AS A SOLDIER...



IN THAT MOMENT, THE FIFTH OF THE SIX SURVIVORS OF DOG COMPANY PROVED THAT HE WAS NO SOLDIER...



THERE WAS ONE MAN LEFT NOW OF THE SIX TOUGH, RUGGED, BATTLE-TRAINED VETERANS, THE FIGHTERS...



AND THAT ONE MAN WAS THE ONLY SOLDIER AMONG THEM, PRIVATE STACY...

BUT THE ORDERS WERE CLEAR ENOUGH AND ALWAYS OBEY ORDERS, THAT'S MY MOTTO. I RECKON THAT'S WHAT A SOLDIER'S JOB IS -- TO OBEY ORDERS. SO...



THE SOLDIER PRESSED DOWN THE PLUNGER...



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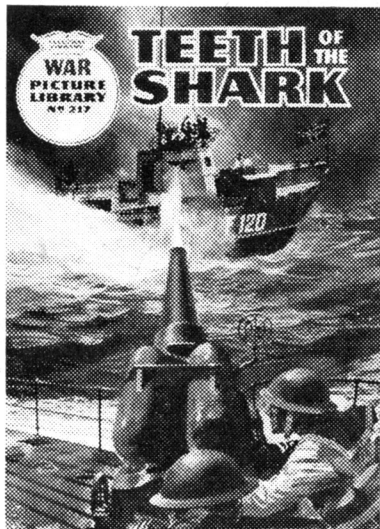
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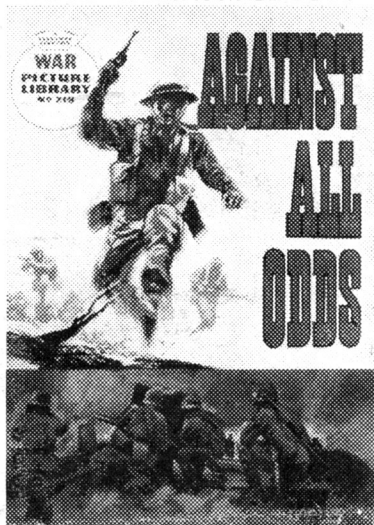
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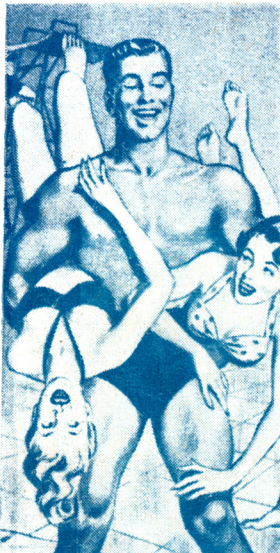
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